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ABSTRACT

Differences in preparing teachers' orientations to the profession and their career goals and aspirations were examined as a function of their life stages and ages. Intensive interviews were conducted before and after the student teaching experience. Half of the student teachers were classified as returning students or adult learners. The other half were college-aged students matched on demographic characteristics. Analyses of the interview data indicated that the two groups had different types of expectations, concerns, anxieties, and commitments to teaching. These differences show how socialization into the profession is affected by the nonacademic experiences of preparing teachers. (Author)

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Teacher Career Development: A Comparison of College-Aged and Older-Adult Preservice Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Differences in preparing teachers' orientations to the profession and their career goals and aspirations were examined as a function of their life stages and ages. Intensive interviews were conducted before and after the student teaching experience. Half of the student teachers were classified as returning students or adult learners. The other half were college-aged students matched on demographic characteristics. Analyses of the interview data indicated that the two groups had different types of expectations, concerns, anxieties, and commitments to teaching. These differences show how socialization into the profession is affected by the nonacademic experiences of preparing teachers.

The primary purpose of this study was to demonstrate that socialization into the teaching profession is affected by the nonacademic experiences of preparing teachers. A secondary objective was to provide insight into the research on teaching which has demonstrated that teachers pass through stages of career development. Both objectives were met by incorporating a life-span developmental perspective into the framework of the study.

Theoretical Framework

Teacher Development

Recently, educational researchers have been attending to the question of whether the professional maturation of teachers follows an orderly sequence. At least two different approaches are recognized and used to address this question (Feiman & Floden, 1981; Floden & Feiman, 1980; Ryan, 1979). The first approach is concerned with inductively generating phases or patterns specific to teacher career development (Applegate & Lashley, 1979; Fuller, 1969; Fuller & Bown, 1975; Gehrke, 1978, 1979; Newman, 1979; Peterson, 1979). The second approach deductively employs theories of psychological development (Harvey, Hunt & Schroder, 1961; Kohlberg, 1968; Loevinger, 1976) as rationales for programs to facilitate professional growth (Glassberg & Sprinthall, 1980; Oja, 1980; Oja & Sprinthall, 1978; Bernier & Sprinthall, 1978). Not only has the interaction between these two approaches been minimal, but neither approach has generated hypotheses about the patterns of maturation during teaching from the patterns of development gleaned from theorists such as Gould (1972), Levinson (1978), Neugarten (1968) and Sheehy (1976). It is these theories which have guided the conceptualization of the present study.

The goal of this reseach effort is to contribute to an understanding of the processes involved in the socialization of teachers. It is hypothesized that these processes are influenced by the academic and nonacademic experiences

and by the "developmental readiness" of preparing teachers. The long range objective is to follow two groups of preparing teachers through their first five years of teaching. This study is a report of the initial phase of that project. Specifically, differences in preparing teachers' orientations to the profession and their career goals and aspirations were examined as a function of their ages. Comparisons were made between preservice teachers who fit into the college student-aged population and preservice teachers who were classified as returning students or adult-learners.

Adult Development

Assuming that there are stages of teaching, how is passage through the stages affected by the life stage or age of the beginning teacher? Life-span development theories provide some direction for responding to this question. Levinson (1978), for example, interviewed forty men eight to ten times during a four year period and proposed three stages of adult life with transitional periods between each. College-aged students fall into a "novice phase" (ages 17-22) in their transition to adulthood while older students are firmly into early adulthood (ages 18-40/45) or middle adulthood (ages 40/45 - 65). Based on a survey of more than 500 persons, Gould (1972, 1978) found that adulthood is characterized by a series of "life concerns" specific to phases of early, middle, and late adulthood. The work of other researchers supports these findings (Neugarten, 1968; Sheehy, 1976).

Researchers of adult development generally are in agreement that there are specific stages of adulthood and that there are certain concerns, crises, or obsessions common to each. The concerns of the young adult focus on preparation for achieving competence and independence in the realms of family, finance, and job security. Observers of beginning teachers note that this is a time of stress and conflict given all of the adjustments to new demands that must be made

(Gehrke, 1979; Ryan et al, 1980). In contrast, the beginning years of teaching should not provoke the same anxieties and adjustments for returning students who have attained competence in these areas. For example, Levinson identified a mentoring role common to adults in a mid-life transition period. If mentoring comes naturally to the 40-45 year old adult, should not the role of teaching be eased into somewhat more smoothly? These and related questions were addresed in this study.

Procedures

Participants

Participants in the study were undergraduate education majors at an urban university in the Midwest. Ten preservice teachers who were at least thirty years old were identified. A second group of college-aged preservice teachers were selected by matching certain of their characteristics to those of the adult learners. Matching was based on (1) the major teaching discipline declared (elementary, special, mathematics, etc.) and (2) sex. Of the twenty invited to participate during the semester reported here, eight college-aged and nine older adults agreed to take part in the study. All participants were involved in the study during the semester in which they completed the student teaching phase of the certification program.

Data Collection

Intensive interviews were conducted individually with each preservice teacher prior to and immediately following the student teaching experience. At the beginning of each interview each student teacher completed the Teacher Concerns Checklist developed by Fuller and her colleagues (George, 1974; George, Borich & Fuller, 1974; George, 1978). This checklist is a 56-item Likert-type questionnaire which assesses the degree to which respondents are concerned about issues related

to teaching. Examples are "whether the students really like me or not" and "clarifying the limits of my authority and responsibility". Subjects respond on a 5-point scale with a score of 1 indicating "no concern at all" and a score of 5 indicating "extreme concern". The second half of the interview was guided by a schedule of questions relevant to either beginning or completing the student teaching phase of the teacher training program. Each schedule was designed to assess the factors influencing the student's conceptualization of teaching at both phases of the program.

Each schedule consisted of two parts. The first part was unstructured and asked each participant to give a verbal "vita" of his or her adult life (pre-student teaching) or to give an account of the significant events during student teaching (post-student teaching). The second part of the interview schedule was structured by specific questions designed to identify such things as (1) sources of stress and satisfaction felt during teacher preparation, (2) influential or supportive persons in each participant's life, (3) the qualities and skills desired for achieving success in teaching, and (4) perceptions of the impact of previous work or life experiences on teaching. During the post-student teaching interviews students were asked about their abilities to deal with such classroom processes as classroon and behavior management, time management, parental conferencing and their supervisor's evaluation. Each interview was 60 - 90 minutes in length. Each was audiorecorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis

Teacher Concerns Checklist. Scales were constructed from the 56 items on the questionnaire using the three factors identified by George (1978) which are referred to as (1) concerns about self as teacher, (2) concerns about the tasks in teaching, and (3) concerns about the impact of teaching on learners.

Scales were also constructed according to six factors identified by Adams et al. (1980, 1981). The six factors were:

1. self concerns about adult perceptions
2. self concerns about pupil perceptions
3. Task concerns as related to instruction
4. Task concerns as related to classroom discipline
5. Impact concerns as related to academics
6. Impact concerns as related to school environmental influences

These six scales are composed of items listed in Table 1. Analyses were completed using these scales as well as individual items to examine differences between the concerns of the college-aged and the older adult student teachers and to examine changes that occurred in each group as a function of student teaching.

Interviews. Analysis of the interview data was accomplished by compiling data pertaining to common themes or concepts. Comparisons were made between the two groups of preparing teachers before and after the semester of student teaching. These comparisions were used to determine if differences in participants' expectations, perceived preparation, and attributions of success or failure were related to their prior experiences.

Results

Of the eight college-aged preservice teachers, seven planned to graduate from college at the end of the semester. The eighth had two courses to complete following student teaching. Two of the nine older adults were returning to school for teacher certification. They had graduated one and two semesters earlier. The other seven were in their final semester of their bachelors' programs. The mean age of the younger group was 22 years. The mean age of the older group was 36 years. There was one male in the younger group and two males in the older group.

Table 1

ITEMS IN THE CONCERNS FACTORS IDENTIFIED BY ADAMS ET AL. (1980, 1981)

Self Concerns

About Pupil Perceptions

Whether the students really like me or not
Acceptance as a friend by students
How students feel about me

About Adult Perceptions
Doing well when a supervisor is present
Getting a favorable evaluation of my teaching
Being accepted and respected by professional persons

Task Concerns

As Related to Instruction
Feeling under pressure too much of the time
The routine and inflecibility of the situation
Becoming too personally involved with students
Working with too many students each day
Lack of academic freedom

As Related to Classroom Discipline
Lack of respect of some students
Maintaining the appropriate degree of class control
The values and attitudes of the current generation
Students who disrupt class

Impact Concerns

As Related to Academics
Meeting the needs of different kinds of students
Diagnosing student learning problems
Challenging unmotivated students
Guiding students toward intellectual and emotional growth
Whether each student is getting what he (or she) needs

As Related to School Environmental Influences
Student health and nutrition problems that affect learning
The psychological climate of the school
Chronic absence and dropping out of students
Student use of drugs

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Teacher Concerns Checklist

Individual items on the questionnaire were examined. The following areas were of highest concern (received responses greater than 4.50) to all of the student teachers at both periods of time:

3. Selecting and teaching content well
5. Whether students are learning what they should
10. Motivating students to study
33. Whether students can apply what they learn
51. My ability to present ideas to the class
52. Helping students to value learning

The item numbers precede each of the concerns. None of these items are contained in either George's (1978) or Adams' (1980, 1981) factors. The following two areas were of lowest concern (received responses less than 2.50) to all student teachers at both points in time:

16. Becoming too personally involved with students
26. Being asked personal questions by my students

Table 2 shows the mean concern scores using George's three scales for all student teachers at both points during the semester. There were no differences between the college-aged group and the older adult group, nor were there significant changes on any of the scales for the pre- to the post-student teaching interviews.

Table 3 shows the mean concern scores using the six factors derived by Adams for both groups before and after student teaching. Analysis of variance indicated significant differences existed between the two groups of student teachers on the self concerns about pupil scale before student teaching [$F(1,15) = 23.94$, $p<.0002$]. These differences were not apparent at the post-student teaching interview. However, both groups of student teachers did show

Table 2

Mean Level of Concerns (after George) of Student Teachers

Before and After Student Teaching

	College Aged (n = 8)		Older Adult (n = 9)	
Concern	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Self	4.35	4.30	4.44	3.91
Task	3.27	3.15	2.91	3.00
Impact	4.28	4.28	4.47	4.44

Table 3

Mean Level of Concerns (after Adams) of Student Teachers

Before and After Student Teaching

	College Aged (n = 8)		Older Adult (n = 9)	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Concern				
Self				
Pupil	3.75	3.50	2.41	3.45
Adult	4.29	4.25	4.33	4.07
Task				
Instructional	3.08	3.15	2.69	2.78
Discipline	4.00	4.06	3.64	3.67
Impact				
Academic	4.28	4.28	4.27	4.44
Environmental	3.91	4.09	3.47	3.58

changes on the self concerns about pupil scale from the beginning to the end of the semester. t-tests for correlated means indicated that the college-aged group's self concerns about pupils lessened significantly [$t(7) = 2.39$, $p<.05$] and that the older adult group's self concerns about pupils grew significantly stronger [$t(8) = -3.53$, $p< .008$]. No other differences were apparent using Adams' scales.

Prior to student teaching the college-aged student teachers were significantly more concerned than the older adults [$F(1,15) = 4.46$, $p < .05$] about "The routine and inflexibility of the situation." This difference was not evident at the end of the semester. At the end of the semester trends were apparent indicating that the college-aged group was more concerned than the older adults about three items: "Acceptance as a friend by students" [$F(1,15) = 6.40$ $p < .02$]; "Clarifying the limits of my authority and responsibility" [$F(1,15) = 4.24$, $p < .06$]; "Feeling more adequate as a teacher" [$F(1,15) = 3.52$, $p < .08$].

Each group showed other changes over the course of the semester. The college-aged group increased their concerns about "Instilling worthwhile concepts and values" [t (7) = -2.65, $p < .03$] and decreased their concerns about "Too many noninstructional duties" [t (7) = 2.38, $p < .05$] and "How pupils feel about me" [t (7) = 4.58, $p < .003$] . The older adults feel less concern after student teaching about "Meeting the needs of different kinds of students" [t (8) = 4.00, $p < .004$]. Trends were evident indicating that at the end of the semester they were less concerned about "Feeling more adequate as a teacher" [t (8) = 2.13, $p < .07$] and more concerned about the "Standards and regulations set for teachers" [t (8) = -1.95, $p < .09$].

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Interviews

The themes which emerged from the analysis of the interview data elucidate the data obtained from the Teacher Concerns Checklists. For the most part the college-aged student teachers were completing a phase of life prescribed by society. They had entered junior college or a four year university upon high school graduation and, with three exceptions, planned to graduate with their bachelors' degrees four years later on schedule. The three exceptions had taken from one to four semesters off along the way. In contrast the older adults had spaced their college attendance over as many as 20 years due to childrearing, family relocation, a need to support the family, entering the service, etc. Three were the first college graduates in their families. Three of the younger student teachers were married, but none were parents. All of the older student teachers had children. Of the three who were divorced, one had remarried.

There was a great difference in the commitment to teaching expressed in both groups. All of the older student teachers stated a desire to secure a classroom position after graduation. Each had carefully selected education and planned on staying in the field. Of the eight younger student teachers only two saw themselves staying in the classroom for any period of time. Many expressed an interest in pursuing other careers after they had "tried teaching" or they simply viewed teaching as a career to fall back upon.

During the interviews each participant was asked to discuss what qualities they valued and wanted to develop as teachers. A striking theme which emerged and which complements the teacher concerns data was the issue of developing interpersonal relationships with students. Six of the eight college-aged student teachers responded that they wanted to be liked, respected, and regarded as a friend by their pupils. In contrast only three older student teachers mentioned this characteristic by stating that it was <u>not</u> important for them. Interpersonal

issues were on the minds of the older students in regards to their relationships with their cooperating teacher and university supervisor. When asked about their apprehensions prior to student teaching, half of the older students were anxious about being observed and evaluated. Most had had the experience of being solely responsible for classroom teaching before, but now dreaded being accountable to a person with authority. With one exception the younger students did not express apprehension about the supervisory process.

All student teachers viewed student teaching as a time to gain confidence, learn managerial techniques, and learn how to present material. The younger group named characteristics they wanted to acquire such as being firm, fair, friendly, nice, warm, and having a sense of humor. In Fuller's (1975) terminology these are concerns about self. However, the older student teachers expressed other concerns having to do with the impact they would have on their pupils. These student teachers wanted "to help kids like learning", "to stimulate children", "to teach kids how to cope with life, to experiment", to diagnose and recognize learning difficulties. These ideal qualities move beyond a concern for self to a concern for the individuality of the learner.

These differences may be related to the prior experiences of the student teachers. Only one of the student teachers had not been in a public school classroom since her own high school graduation. The others had all had some experience working in schools or with children. The younger student teachers had camp counselor and babysitting experiences. Four had substitute taught for a semester; two were religious school teachers. Several methods classes had provided field experiences for some. Their experiences with children were predictable for the college-aged population, but minimal when compared to the older student teachers. When asked which nonacademic experiences had the most influence on their student teaching, the older students immediately responded that the experience of raising their own children was extremely important. As

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parents most had volunteered in their childrens' schools, worked as girl scout or boy scout leaders, or taught religious school. Three had been substitute teaching on a daily basis for at least a year; two had taught preschool classes for three and five years; one had been employed in the public school system as an assistant for a year. The confidence and commitment to teaching expressed by the older student teachers was markedly stronger than in the college-aged student teachers.

These themes are a portion of those which emerged from the interview data. They demonstrate clearly that there are differences between the two groups of student teachers as early as teacher training. How these differences will manifest themselves in the future remains an empirical question.

Discussion

The data reported here are based upon a small sample and should be considered preliminary. As cases are added to the data set the trends and themes observed will be confirmed or reorganized. The most obvious theme to emerge is that of the import of student teacher's experiences prior to student teaching. In this sample the commitment to education and to teaching was strongest among those who had had more and varied experiences with children. In fact, these older students had had a wider variety of life experiences than their younger colleagues. Certainly this is to be expected given that they had more time in which to accomplish such activities, yet it raises the issue of whether such information can be used to predict successful teachers or more simply, to predict or determine who remains in the profession.

The contribution that the data make to knowledge about the career development of teachers is narrow because the concern here is with only the beginning of professional preparation. Nevertheless, the study adds a unique dimension to the literature on teacher socialization: the dimension of individual differences

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among teachers. Previous research has provided insight into the perceptions of middle-aged (Newman, 1979), retired (Peterson, 1979), and beginning teachers (Applegate & Lashley, 1979; Ryan et al., 1980), but the teachers in these studies were members of the same cohort. The students involved in the present study were separated by at least a generation of differences.

Indeed, it is imperative that we learn more about the prior experiences of returning students to be better prepared for an increase in women pursuing second- or delayed - careers who will be seeking certificates in teaching. These persons will have different staff development needs than the typical beginning teachers who graduate from college at age 21. Finally, there are few longitudinal studies which explore the socialization process. The longitudinal studies to date research changes in variables such as attitude change (Mahan & Lacefield, 1978; Parkay, 1980) or personality (Yee, 1968, 1969; Circirelli, 1969), or teaching behaviors (Adams et al., 1980, 1981). The socialization studies available include only cross-sectional data. Thus, the research reported here will be significant for redressing some of these shortcomings.

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